

Black Crappie and Introduced Fish Information

Black crappie are a popular game fish in North Carolina providing recreational fishing opportunities and delicious table fare. However, black crappie are not a desired species in small water bodies. Opinions vary on how big a body of water should be before it can support crappie without detrimental effects. Some sources say 5 acres, others say 300 acres. Crappie tend to overpopulate and become stunted quickly. They are of little value once stunted and are a very prolific species, laying up to 188,000 eggs in a season. Crappie have also been known to limit bass and catfish populations. When bass eggs hatch, the fry swim to open water to begin their life feeding on microcrustaceans. This is when they are most vulnerable, especially to schools of crappie waiting for the bass fry in deep water.

Depending on which source you believe, most of Fort Bragg's impoundments are borderline at best in terms of being large enough to support fishable black crappie populations. Well meaning fishermen have introduced crappie and other fish species into several ponds on Ft Bragg. **This is not only a bad idea, it is also illegal!** Introducing fish species can ruin fisheries. Several ponds on Ft Bragg have fish in them that were not originally stocked and are believed or known to have been brought in by fishermen. Introducing fish species can throw off the pond balance and even introduce diseases. Even introducing largemouth bass can have negative effects. Several Ft Bragg lakes also restrict the use of minnows as bait. This is because fishermen tend to dump unused minnows into the lake, which they think "feeds" the lake. Dumping minnows into lakes can introduce unwanted species like golden shiners, common carp, or chubsuckers, which may establish a population and limit game fish populations. Fish stocking and transplanting should be left to those managing the fishery. Most ponds on Ft Bragg are managed for largemouth bass, bluegill, redear sunfish, and channel catfish. The four intensively managed catfish lakes are managed solely for channel catfish. Occasionally, sterile grass carp are stocked on Ft Bragg for weed control. Grass carp are rarely caught on hook and line, but if they are, we encourage their release.

Because of the desire for crappie on Ft Bragg, part of Mott Lake's management plan will now include management for black crappie. Wildlife Branch will be transplanting adult crappie to Mott Lake from other lakes on Ft Bragg in an effort to enhance crappie populations in Mott Lake, and reduce crappie populations in other lakes where they are a nuisance. In addition, Christmas trees have already been placed in Mott Lake as fish attractors, specifically to provide habitat for crappie.

How can fishermen help fish populations on Ft Bragg? By harvesting undesirable species, not transplanting fish to other bodies of water, not dumping minnows or other baitfish into lakes, and selective harvest of game fish. The managed lakes (Big Muddy, Croatan, Deer Pen, Little Muddy, McArthur, Mott, Overhills, Quail, Smith, and Texas) would all benefit from increased release of game fish (bass, bluegill, redear sunfish) and increased harvest of other species like pickerel, crappie, warmouth, and bullheads. Intensively managed lakes (Boundary Line, Holland, Hurley, Kiest, McFayden, and Simmons) are more complex in their harvest issues except that we encourage harvest of crappie, warmouth, pickerel, bullheads, pumpkinseed, and redbreast sunfish. The intensively managed cat fish lakes (Andrews Church, Lower McKellar's, Moss Gill, and Wyatt) contain other species besides channel catfish. The catfish lakes would improve if fishermen harvested other species present like bream, crappie, bass, and common carp.